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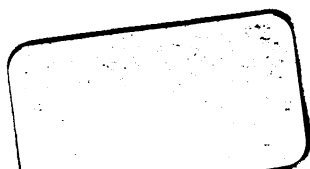
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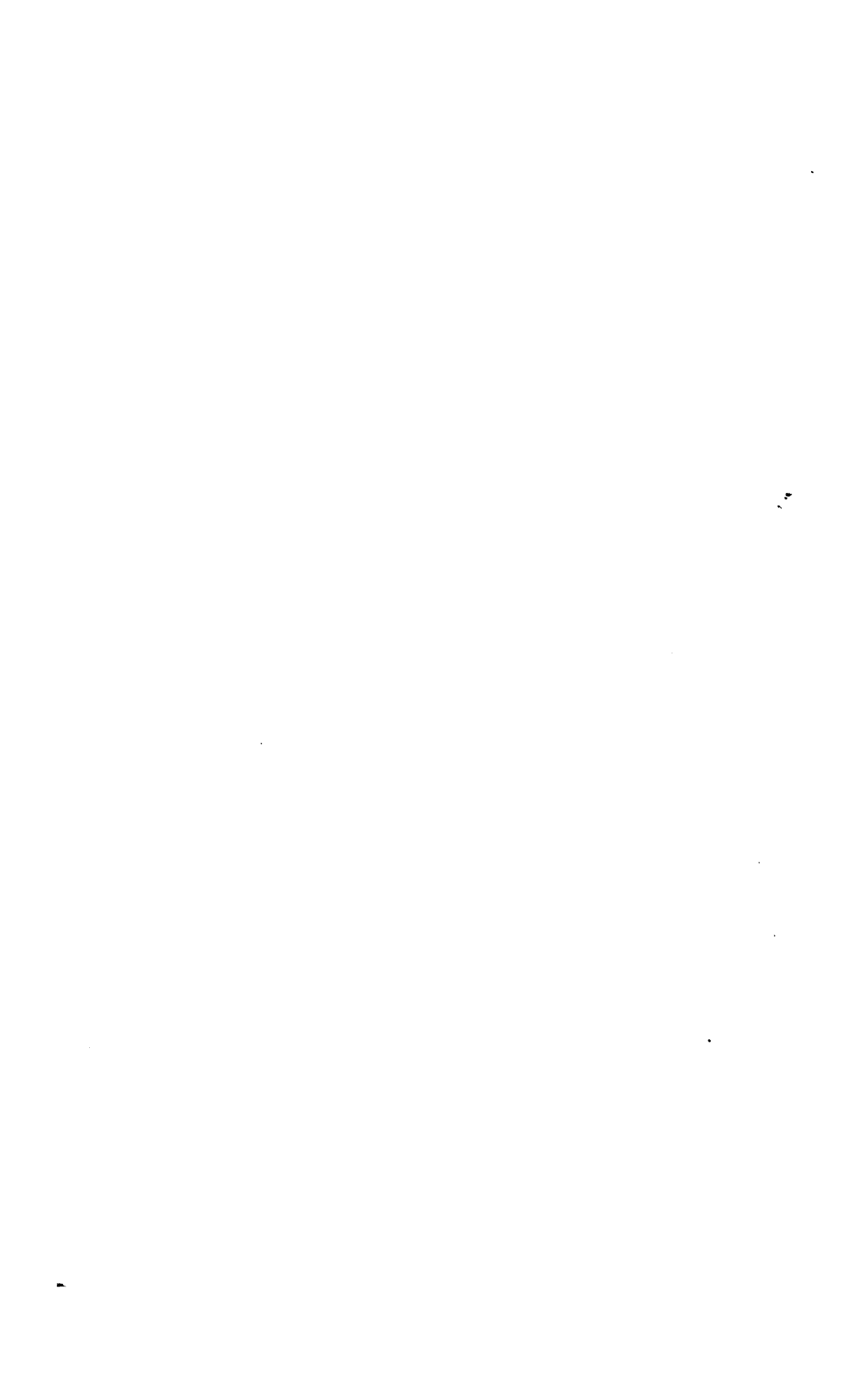
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A
LETTER

to

SIR WILLIAM PULTENEY, BART.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

Shrewsbury House of Industry, 23d Jan. 1797.

AT A GENERAL BOARD,

The Rev. H. C. ADAMS, in the Chair :

Mr. Wood having communicated his Letter, addrested to Sir William Pulteney, Bart. on the subject of the Bill for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor :

Resolved unanimously,

That he be requested to publish the same.

A
LETTER
TO
SIR WILLIAM PULTENEY, BART.

Representative in Parliament for
THE BOROUGH OF SHREWSBURY,

CONTAINING

Some Observations
ON THE BILL

FOR

The better Support and Maintenance

OF

THE POOR,

PRESENTED TO

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
BY THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

SECOND EDITION,

WITH CONSIDERABLE ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS.

BY I. WOOD,

Author of Some Account of the Shrewsbury House of Industry.

Shrewsbury :

PRINTED BY J. AND W. EDDOWES.

Sold by J. Stockdale, Piccadilly, Cadell and Davies, in the
Strand, and T. N. Longman, Paternoster Row, London.

1797.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE Author of the following observations, has availed himself of the opportunity which a Second Edition afforded, to add some further remarks upon those clauses in the Bill now pending in Parliament—"for the better support and maintenance of the Poor," which, in the hurry of his former publication, he had either wholly omitted or but slightly adverted to. He has also given an Abstract of the Shrewsbury Petition, since presented, because that Petition clearly and forcibly points out the important advantages derived from that present management of their House of Industry, which the Bill in question would supersede.

He is very far from entertaining a design, or even a wish, to irritate; but at the same time, strongly impressed with a conviction of the evil—the alarming consequences, that must ensue from the adoption of the measure now proposed; he is truly anxious to state his objections with all that force and freedom, which may be necessary to convince.

Shrewsbury, February 20th, 1797.

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A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

AS a Representative for this Borough in Parliament, I take the liberty of addressing to you some Considerations on a Measure in which your Constituents, as well as the Public at large, are highly interested. And it is with particular satisfaction that I lay them before a Gentleman, who so diligently attends to, and so honestly and faithfully executes, his duty in the British Senate,

You,

You, Sir, will, I am well persuaded, give them a candid and impartial examination; and decide on the important question to which they advert, with sound, unbiaſſed judgment, and enlightened diſcretion. It would ill become me unnecessarily to take up any of your valuable time; I ſhall, therefore, without further introduction, proceed to thoſe Obſervations on the “ Bill for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor,” which appear to me deſerving of very ſerious conſideration, on this moſt weighty ſubject.

The Proviſion made by this Bill for the *Employment* of the Poor, is evidently taken from two excellent Inſtitutions eſtabliſhed on the Continent; the one at Munich, under the direction of Count RUMFORD; the other at Hamburgh, of which an admirable account has been publiſhed by the worthy Mr. VOGHT. But the ſituation of the Poor in thoſe Cities is very different from their ſituation in this Kingdom; the active government of thoſe eſtabliſhments is placed in very different hands; and they are much better attended to, than can poſſibly

sibly be expected under the regulations of the present bill. If, indeed, a RUMFORD, or a VOGHT could be found to execute the office of "Manager of the Poor," in every District School of Industry to be established throughout the whole Kingdom, much fewer objections would lie against the present measure,

It cannot be justly said in this Kingdom, that the Community does not contribute in a very ample and liberal manner, to the support and assistance of the poor and necessitous. On the contrary, it is, I believe, the only Country upon earth, where a legal provision is made for that purpose. But the difficulty lies in so administering that provision, as not to render it a temptation to idleness, and a fund applicable to the purposes of intemperance and debauchery. That it *has*, and *does* operate, to produce these deplorable effects, cannot be denied: and to correct this great evil, is the point to which all reform in our code of Poor Laws, ought to be principally directed. For, if the sums thus misapplied, were deducted from the annual amount of

the poor-rates, there would remain a sufficient surplus for the relief of the really necessitous and distressed.

The remedy must undoubtedly consist in the adoption of some plan for introducing **INDUSTRY AMONG THE POOR**, and compelling all that are able, to earn their own support. But so long as the management of the Poor is vested in *Annual Officers*, whether they be denominated *Overseers*, *Managers*, or *Wardens of the Poor*; every attempt to effect this important reform must inevitably fail of success. Their own occupations, as I have elsewhere observed,* afford them not sufficient leisure for that regular attendance and attention, which this would require; and, by the time they become a little accustomed to the duties of their office, and acquainted with the poor placed under their management, their term of service expires, and fresh men succeed them, who labour under the same disadvantages.

In

* See printed Account of the Shrewsbury House of Industry, 4th edit.

In the present Bill, indeed, "Members of Parliament, Privy Counsellors, Commissioners of the Land Tax, &c. &c." are appointed "Visitors of the Poor."* But the office is not compulsory upon any of the persons described;† and, however zealous a few individuals may be at the outset, when they come to experience the difficulties, embarrassments, and innumerable disagreeable circumstances, that will infallibly attend the execution of the present plan, they will very soon become disgusted with the rubs and obstacles that will perpetually occur, grow weary of the employment they have accepted; and either neglect its duties, or resign their office. Nor is it indeed required from these "Visitors" that they should take up the labouring oar: they are only when they think proper to *visit* the Schools of Industry,

* The eleventh Clause of the Bill—p. 6, of the folio copy printed by order of the House of Commons, to which all the subsequent references are made.

† "Provided always, That the said persons so from time to time to be appointed Visitors by the said Justices, and *assenting unto such appointment.*" Eleventh Clause, p. 6.

dustry, and "alter, regulate, and appoint, the rate of wages and allowances." * And it may often happen, when these Visitors are speculative, theoretical men, inexperienced in the practical part of the business to be carried on in these Schools, that their visitation, superintendence, and controul, may—in the words of a celebrated Dignitary of the Church—render "confusion worse confounded."

The men, then, upon whom the execution of this vast plan must principally and ultimately rest, are the "Wardens of the Poor;" † and such of them more particularly, as are appointed to have the care of the Schools, under the denomination of "The Managers of the Schools of Industry." ‡

Let us now stop for a moment, to consider upon whom this mighty burden is imposed?—Upon Wardens, or persons chosen

* Twenty-fifth Clause, p. 13.

† Fifteenth Clause, p. 8.

‡ Ibid. p. 9.

chosen out of the annual Overseers.*— Upon men who, in general, have their own employments, and the maintenance of their own families to attend to.— Upon men, the great majority of whom cannot be supposed capable of conducting a manufactory.— And, upon men who, when they enter upon office, are strangers to the poor committed to their care, as well as to every part of that business they are required to execute; and, before they can acquire much practical experience, go out of office again, and are succeeded by others precisely in the same predicament.†

It

* “ There shall be appointed for every parish united by virtue of this Act, one Person to be Warden of the Poor; and one of those Persons shall be appointed to the care and management of the School or Schools of Industry, and of the Poor receiving employment, &c. and for every Parish not united, there shall also be appointed one Warden, or where no Warden is appointed, then the Overseers shall execute the Office.” Clause Fifteen, p. 8.

† Fifteenth Clause.—The wording of this clause is obscure; but if it is intended that a manager *once* chosen shall *continue* in office, or be as it were a perpetual overseer, the appointment, with all the business attached to it by this Bill, and the loose inspection to which it is subjected, is still more exceptionable.

It is very material also further to consider, what these "Managers," thus circumstanced, are to undertake? — They are "from time to time, to provide a proper stock of hemp, flax, silk, thread, cotton, wool, iron, leather, or other materials; and also prepare tools and implements for the employment of the poor."* If they neglect to do this, for the short space of "ten days," after receiving an order for that purpose from "two Justices of the Peace," those Justices may "compel them to provide such materials *at their own expense*; and, in default of payment, levy the same, with costs, by distress."†

This clause, when applied to men so circumstanced, is surely highly arbitrary and severe: but I am willing to believe, that the Minister, in the multitude of his important avocations, had not leisure to consider the nature of this very penal provision. The natural consequences of such a regulation, thus rigidly enforced, will be, that "The Manager," to avoid the penalty, will

* Seventeenth Clause, p. 9. † Eighteenth Clause, p. 10.

to any of the poor within his district: * he is to take care that no poor person refuse to permit his children, above five years old, to be sent to the School of Industry: † he is to settle the rate of wages each such child is to be allowed: ‡ he is to settle terms with Overseers of the Highways, &c. for the hire of the poor: § and he is to contract for the necessary land and buildings. || This, and a great deal more, is the employment allotted to this Manager.

Is it possible, Sir, that a duty so complicated, and so important, can be executed in a proper, effectual, and beneficial manner, by such a Manager; under all the disadvantages of inexperience, attention to his own family, and private concerns? The frauds and mismanagement of Overseers is the subject of general complaint; but, instead of providing a remedy, the door is here set still wider open, for the admission of every species of abuse; and the artful Manager will laugh in his sleeve at all the visitations

* Clause 19, p. 10. † Clause 20, p. 11. ‡ Ibid.

§ Clause 24, p. 13. || Clauses 33, 34, p. 19.

visitations of Privy Counsellors, Commissioners, &c. he will easily find out methods to elude all their vigilance; nay, by misrepresentations, not easily detected, to obtain a sanction to his own misconduct, in their *probatum est*.

But, admitting all the Managers to be honest, worthy, disinterested men; and supposing that all their successors, in all future years, will be of the same description, still I maintain, that it is not in the nature of things, that an attempt to establish manufactories for the employment of the poor, should ever succeed, when committed to the management of a succession of men so circumstanced; allowing them all the benefit of the adventitious aid provided by the present Bill. It is equally impossible, that the execution of such a plan should ever contribute “gradually to reduce the excessive amount of the poor rates.”*

Neither is this end likely to be obtained, by the additional allowances, &c. proposed to be granted to the poor, by
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* Preamble to the Bill.

the present Bill. Humanity, at the first glance, is indeed delighted with these indulgencies: but, upon a moment's reflection, numerous circumstances present themselves, to dissipate the gay delusion. If these allowances, as is intended, become general; and, at the same time, the other provisions of the Bill are carried into effect; it requires not the sagacity of a NEWTON, the penetration of a LOCKE, nor the inspiration of a Prophet, to pronounce with the utmost certainty, and from the fullest conviction, that the poor rates— heavy as they are at present—will be nearly, if not altogether doubled. A very serious consideration! For, to an exceedingly numerous and valuable class of our fellow subjects, who *now* groan under the grievous burden, it would *then* become altogether insupportable.

If all poor persons having more than two children, are to have a right to demand these weekly allowances; that abuse of the parochial aid, now so prevalent, so loudly, and so justly complained of, will be increased in a ten-fold ratio. Persons
who

who are poor, only because they are debauched, dissolute, and extravagant, will claim these allowances; and it will increase their indolence and debauchery, without benefitting their families. There are thousands of mechanics, and manufacturers, at Birmingham, Manchester, &c. &c. who can earn from one to two or three guineas a week: but (without this additional encouragement to their indolence and extravagance) they are already too generally disposed to neglect their work, as soon as they have earned what they deem sufficient for their weekly expenditure; the remainder of the week is spent in idleness and dissipation. Their families, in the mean time, are barely supplied with absolute necessaries: no provision is made for a time of sickness and disability; nor have they the least inducement to make that provision; because whenever that distress occurs, the parish is applied to, and their case becomes, for the time, a case of real necessity; for, if they are not relieved—they perish.

Thus are the “ frugal and industrious
burdened with the support of the idle and
pro-

profligate;" and the additional provision to be allowed them by the present Bill, will only serve to aggravate the distress of the one, and add to the dissipation and debauchery of the other. That the annual amount of this family pension, for every poor family resident throughout the whole of the Kingdom, will create a most enormous addition to the parochial expenditure; is so abundantly self-evident, that to attempt the proof of it would be absurd.

I have here, Sir, a fact to state from authentic documents,* that must impress every thinking mind, with feelings I am unable to describe.

In the year 1787, the expenditure at Birmingham, for the support of the poor, was Eleven Thousand One Hundred and Thirty Two Pounds Sixteen Shillings and Ninepence Halfpenny. Considerable as this must be deemed, there has been a progressive increase; and, the last year, it was advanced to Twenty Four Thousand and Fifty Pounds Fourteen Shillings and Three

* A printed account published by the Overseers.

Three Halfpence. The total amount of this expenditure in ten successive years, for the town of Birmingham only, came to ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY TWO THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY ONE POUNDS THREE SHILLINGS AND TWOPENCE: and in this short space, the *annual* expenditure was more than doubled.

It is time, it will be said, to attempt some reform.—True.—But is it a time, by increasing the allowances to these people, *again* to double the parochial tax?—Is it a time to erect buildings, create salaries, and incur all the expense of providing materials, in order to attempt so doubtful, so hazardous an experiment, as that of carrying on a manufactory under the *actual* direction of individual managers?—The Birmingham Overseers will tell you, that the attempt has been made again and again, with every *real* advantage that can be derived from the provisions of the present Bill; but—it has never succeeded. Indeed there are few populous parishes in the kingdom, in which the attempt has not been repeatedly made, and as often failed

failed of success; the annual Officers have not leisure for that attendance and unremitting attention indispensably requisite, and "the annual change of these Officers, has commonly produced an annual change of plan; new measures have been adopted, often founded in caprice, sometimes in self-interest, and all ending in miscarriage and disappointment."* To the "Managers" appointed by the pending Bill, this objection will strictly apply.

In truth, Sir, the times are too serious, too critical, and too gloomy, to hazard so very *doubtful* an experiment at best, at the risk of exciting general discontent. There are many thousands of honest, industrious, families in this kingdom, who are greatly distressed, and can barely make a shift to struggle with their present difficulties. A very small addition to their burdens will cause the cup of misery to overflow, and plunge them into a state of wretchedness, that may prove hazardous to the public peace.

The

* See Account of Shrewsbury House of Industry.

The Bill in question, however, goes on to saddle the poor rates with further charges, not only most grievous in point of expense, but of the most pernicious tendency. It provides, that "if any poor person, not able to earn the full rate or wages usually given, shall contract and agree to work at any inferior rate or wages, which wages shall not be sufficient for the maintenance and support of such poor person and his family, it shall and may be lawful to make up such deficiency out of the poor rates: the parish advancing the money to any person not having any lawful settlement therein, to be reimbursed."* What is this but to hold out a bribe to indolence, instead of a premium and encouragement to laborious exertions? And to what frauds and collusions between the *hirers* and the *hired*, will this provision give rise? I have heard of a very large parish, not above five miles from the Metropolis, the farmers resident in which, about a dozen years ago, had ordered it so, as from time to

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* Second Clause, p. 2.

time to keep the management of the poor in their own hands, by returning one another to the office of overseers. At length the citizens occupying country houses in that parish, finding the poor rate continually advancing, contrived to get at the accounts of these parochial officers; when they discovered, that almost every labourer in the parish employed in husbandry, was on the list of weekly pay: and, upon a further scrutiny, that in consequence of their being allowed four or five shillings a week from the parish, they hired themselves to their employers for two or three shillings a week less than the usual rate of wages. It is material to observe, that the houses occupied by these citizens, being let at very high rents, paid a very considerable portion of the parochial assessments. I dare say, the good men concerned in this artful management, chuckle at the prospect of having such lucrative agreements established by law.

But the concluding provision in this clause is more exceptionable still. If poor persons are to be paid this deficiency of
wages

wages by parishes wherein they reside, but have no legal settlement, and such parishes are to be reimbursed by the parish to which each pauper thus relieved belongs, it will be impossible for any one parish to calculate the probable amount of their annual expenditure; for the payments will be making throughout the whole kingdom, and till these demands are sent in at the close of the year, no one can possibly guess at the sum total of them. To how many litigations also respecting parochial settlements, must this give rise? In what a multiplicity of instances will it turn out, that the person thus relieved, does not actually belong to the parish charged with this relief? the consequence of which must be a trial at sessions, or elsewhere, respecting every such case. The frauds and impositions also, that will be practised by virtue of this provision, may be guessed at by those which have taken place respecting the families of militia men; great numbers of whom have received their allowances, long after the men for whose service they had been granted, were dead or discharged.

Another provision in this Bill must have been suggested to the Minister by some gentleman, who would delight to indulge his own crude speculations, however mischievous the consequences that would result therefrom. If this gentleman should be invested with the power given to Justices and Visitors, I should like much to see the accounts of his district, a year or two hence. The proposition I allude to is plausible; and it is no wonder the right honourable gentleman's humanity should hastily catch at an idea, that presented itself to him in so fascinating a garb. — Any poor person, who thinks he shall be enabled thereby to maintain his family, without further parochial relief, may have a sum of money advanced to him for the purchase of a cow, or other animal yielding profit.*

Now, Sir, if only twenty poor persons in a whole parish obtain this assistance, upwards of Two Hundred Pounds will be thus expended in the first instance. If a hundred poor persons (which in many parishes

* Third Clause p. 2.

parishes would be a very moderate computation) are thus relieved, more than a Thousand Pounds must be immediately advanced, for the parochial expenditure in this one article only. Every cottager will think he has a peculiar claim to this indulgence; and, if inclosures continue, where will there be found pasture enough for all these animals? If such sums were to be *advanced*, to poor persons having four children for instance, out of their weekly allowance, it would be between two and three years before the account would be balanced; and suppose in the mean time any particular distress should take place in such families, either all relief must be refused, on account of the large sum they stand indebted to the parish, or the parochial expenditure, where many such instances occur, (which will certainly be the case) must be enormously augmented.

Further; the Cow thus purchased by a poor person, may die, or become useless; is then a second sum of money to be advanced for the purchase of another? and are parishes to be saddled with this immense

menſe additional diſburſement *ad infinitum*? I would aſk the ſuggeſter of this curious proviſion, what proportion of theſe cows would remain in the poſſeſſion of the poor, three months after the purchaſe?—It is not hazarding a very bold aſſertion to declare—not one in twenty. Beſides, either this aid muſt be given to all poor perſons in the ſame predicament, or there muſt be partial, and unjuſt preferences; and, what a wide field does all this open for fraud and abuſe?

There is yet another very weighty objection to the preſent plan. And that is, the immense expenſe that muſt be inevitably incurred, before the wheels of this cumbrous machine can be ſet in motion. The kingdom is to be divided into diſtricts; * land is to be purchaſed; † warehouses, workhouſes for preparing the raw materials, and Schools of Induſtry, are to be erected in every diſtrict; ‡ furniture, machines, working tools, hemp, flax, ſilk, thread, cotton, wool, iron, leather, &c. are to be provided; § ſalaries
to

* Tenth Clauſe, p. 8. † Twenty-ninth Clauſe, p. 16.

‡ Fourteenth Clauſe, p. 8. § Twenty-fixth Clauſe, p. 14. and Seventeenth Clauſe, p. 9.

to be paid to the warehouse keepers, and wages to "proper and skilful workmen and servants, for preparing these materials, in order to their being put into the hands of the poor, for the purpose of being manufactured." If the woollen manufactory is attempted, fulling mills must be erected. These, with the tenters, looms, jennies, warping mills, carding machines, &c. &c. will cost an immense sum for each District House: and, without the smallest inclination to exaggerate, I am convinced, that whatever manufacture is attempted, these preparatory expenses, including the raw materials, buildings, &c. will require, for the nation at large, an immediate advance of several millions.

If I have succeeded in my attempt to prove, that after all, the probability of success from this plan for establishing parochial manufactories is less than doubtful; it follows, as an undeniable consequence, that the present scheme ought *never* to be adopted. But more particularly objectionable must the attempt be at the present period; for, its failure must inevitably produce

duce consequences, that every friend to his Country, and, I will add, every man of Humanity too, cannot contemplate, even in idea, without horror and dismay.

There are sundry enacting clauses in the Bill, by which HOUSES OF INDUSTRY, established by special Acts of Parliament, are rendered subject to all its provisions.*

I hope,

* Clauses 49, 52, 53, 54, 56, p. 24, 25, 26.—
The following are extracts from these Clauses :

“ It shall be lawful for the person or persons appointed to the management of the poor, or of any House of Industry, &c. incorporated by any Act or Acts of Parliament, by whatsoever name or names such persons shall be distinguished, to establish a School or Schools of Industry under this Act, *and to pursue the regulations herein contained for the management of the poor therein.*”

“ No town, &c. incorporated by any Act or Acts of Parliament, nor any Parish or Parishes where any House of Industry, Workhouse, or other House, for the keeping, maintaining, or employing the poor, shall have been established under the authority of any act of Parliament specially passed for the purpose, shall be required to build, purchase, or hire, any School or Schools of Industry, in any case where a school for the instruction and employment of the poor shall form
a part

I hope, Sir, I shall be able to make it appear, that the enforcement of these clauses, would not only be highly unjust, but equally impolitic. There are now in this kingdom many establishments of this kind, and the parishes by whom they have been adopted, have expended, some of them six, some of them ten thousand pounds, and others still larger sums, upon the faith of Parliament, pledged to them in those special Acts. I contend that the regulations they have adopted, are far better calculated to produce the effect of introducing Industry among the Poor, and thereby "gradually reducing the excessive amount of the poor rates." And

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a part of such Establishment. *Provided*, that from and after the passing of this Act, no Contract or Agreement for the Maintenance or Support of the Poor, or for taking the benefit of the work, labour, or service of the poor kept therein, shall be made or executed, or shall be valid or effectual. *Provided also*, that every House of Industry, &c. shall within any District or Districts of a County, for which Visitors are appointed, be subject to Visitation and SUPERINTENDANCE, in all matters and things in which any jurisdiction is hereby given to any person or persons whatever, as fully and effectually as if such House of Industry, &c. had been established under this act."

I contend further, that experience has in many instances demonstrated the expediency, practicability, and advantage, of the different plan they have adopted. The poor rates have *actually* been reduced; habits of industry, sobriety, and good morals, *have* been introduced among the poor; and the pleasing prospect opened thereby, is continually expanding.

I speak on this subject from my own observation and experience. I am now, for the second time, in the Direction of one of these Establishments. I have seen children, trained up in this seminary, become useful members of the community, happy in themselves, and no longer burdensome to the public. I could, at this hour, entertain Mr. PITT with the pleasing spectacle of Two Hundred Children and Youth, well fed, clothed, and taught; the young ones attending the schools established in the House; those of five years old and upwards, busy at the wheel, the jenny and the loom: all of them early inured to habits of cleanliness, decency and virtue, and happily preserved from the misery and

and contagion of vice: I know that if this establishment had not taken place, these very children would have been strolling and begging in our streets, covered with filth and rags, without education or instruction, unless it were instruction in the arts of pilfering, and education in the habits of debauchery. I could shew him the prostitute, snatched from the paths of infamy, and rescued from the fangs of disease, labouring diligently for her support. He might visit our various departments, and see the healthy all usefully employed; the sick, the aged, and the infirm, carefully attended to by nurses appointed for the purpose, and provided with every necessary comfort and accommodation.

I have had the pleasure of laying before many benevolent enquirers and distinguished characters, the whole detail of our management. It has been submitted to the strict scrutiny of men, not more eminent for their discernment, than distinguished for their exalted philanthropy. I have been gratified by their warm approbation, and endeavoured to profit by their suggestions.

gestions. Above all, I have been supremely delighted to behold, as they contemplated our various classes, and particularly our little labourers, the tear of generous sensibility trickling down their cheeks; and their animated countenances strongly marked, with the noblest emotions that can take place in the human heart.

It will not be thought surprizing, therefore, that the Inhabitants of these United Parishes, who have continually before their eyes the happy consequences of this Institution; and who so sensibly feel its beneficial operation upon the poor rate under the present management; should be seriously alarmed at the apprehension of that change, which the provisions of the pending Bill will introduce. Nor that they should flock to a Meeting, held by public summons, of the Chief Magistrate, and most cordially and unanimously, without one dissentient voice, concur in that Petition, which you, Sir, have done them the honour, to present to Parliament; and which they are confident you will, in conjunction with their other worthy Representative, the

Honourable

Honourable WILLIAM HILL, do them the justice, most strenuously to support. They well know that your solid abilities, and well-earned reputation in the British Senate, will give weight to your exertions; and they are equally convinced, that in promoting the prayer of their petition, you will at the same time render essential service to the nation at large; for it cannot be, but that the objections which have, and will, be stated to the Honourable House in a variety of petitions, must operate to effect, not only local exemptions, but either a total excision, or radical alteration, of the present Bill.

It will be seen by our Petition, that our Magistrates are by no means ambitious of obtaining that additional authority and control it is intended to invest them with; for they have joined with every other description of Inhabitants in this application.

It is stated in this Petition, that in the purchase of the necessary lands, buildings, implements, and machinery, for our HOUSE of INDUSTRY, there has been expended

pended near Eight Thousand Pounds. That by means of this Establishment, the aged, and infirm poor, have been comfortably provided for; the young trained up in habits of industry and decency; a stop has been put to the great frauds and abuses that prevailed in the parochial expenditure; and those poor who have laboured under temporary distress or disability, have been more liberally assisted and relieved in their own dwellings, than had before been found practicable. That, while the poor themselves have derived these important benefits from this Institution, the petitioners have also been very considerably relieved from the heavy and growing burden of the parochial taxes. That the poor rates for these united parishes, have ever since the commencement of this undertaking, been reduced upwards of one third; and that the amount of this reduction, in the term of twelve years subsequent to this establishment, is Nineteen Thousand Three Hundred and Fifteen Pounds, Thirteen Shillings and Sixpence. That this very considerable reduction has taken place, notwithstanding the farther charge of more than

than Two Thousand pounds upon the said rates, for the erecting of bridges thrown down by violent inundations, the maintenance of the families of men serving in the Militia, and the parochial levies for the Army and Navy. That the petitioners are well convinced, these combined and inestimable advantages have arisen from the good management of the Board of Directors, appointed under the authority of the special act granted for this Establishment; that the qualifications required, have rendered this Board respectable; the number of Directors secured the advantage of combined judgment and due deliberation; effectually prevented the abuse and oppression of the poor; and, from the particular form of their Constitution, enabled them to act with the advantage of practical knowledge and experience in the duties of their office. The petitioners therefore pray for a total Exemption from the operation of the pending Bill.

And now, Sir, let me be permitted to ask, Are such Establishments, after all the expense that has been incurred, after all
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the good that has been produced, when the greatest difficulties have been surmounted, and the fairest prospects were opening before them, to be at one stroke overturned, in order to make way for so hazardous an experiment? Is the conduct of these establishments, and of that employment for the poor, which constitutes their most striking feature, to be subjected to the arbitrary power vested by this Bill in two Justices of the Peace, or the superintendence and control of visiting Privy Counsellors, Commissioners of the Land Tax, &c. &c.?— It will perhaps be replied, No. The Bill only converts *Houses* of Industry into *Schools* of Industry; and under the latter denomination they may be continued. But *how* are they to be continued? That mode of culture under which they have flourished, and borne such precious fruit, is to be wholly set aside; and another to be adopted, that in one year—I had almost said, one short month—will completely undo, with respect to their present occupiers, all that has been effected. Can it require any laboured argument to prove, that the conduct of such Establishments, vested in a permanent

permanent Board of Directors,* is in much better hands than the *Schools of Industry* will be, each under the care of a Manager? The qualification of the Directors, as stated in our Petition, renders them respectable: their number secures proper deliberation, and enables them to act with the advantage of combined judgment; their duty also, in consequence of the regulations that have been established, is neither burdensome nor disgusting.

In the *Schools of Industry*, to be erected under the authority of the present Bill, no provision is made for the reception, accommodation, and support of the aged, the infirm, those natural children that are thrown upon the parish from their birth, nor of those who from the death of their parents, or other circumstances, it is necessary the parish should altogether provide for. In the *Houses of Industry*, all these

* The Board is thus constituted: There are twelve Directors; they act for three years, and four go out by rotation every year; so that two thirds of the Body are always experienced in the Duties of their Office. I term it therefore a *permanent* Board. They are subject to a penalty for non-attendance at the Weekly Boards.

these circumstances have been duly attended to,

I am well aware of an objection that has been made upon this ground to Houses of Industry. I know that it has made a serious impression upon many humane and benevolent minds, and produced strong prejudices against these Establishments. It has been said, that the Directors of Houses of Industry, under the authority vested in them by the special Acts of Parliament they have obtained, are empowered to refuse relief to those poor who will not quit their own dwellings, and come to reside altogether in these houses; And that it is extremely cruel, thus to deprive them of all the comforts, enjoyments, and pleasures of domestic life.

Sir, I embrace with all my soul the conclusion here stated; but I deny the premises from which it is deduced. The power of the Magistrate to order relief to the poor in their own houses, remains the same as when each parish had its separate work-house; the Directors—I speak for those at the Shrewsbury House in particular,

lar, (and I have no reason to believe that the case is different in others)—have always been in the habit and practice of granting this relief. We have indeed endeavoured to guard to the utmost of our power against those frauds and impositions, which have very much swelled the parochial expenditure for the support of the poor; but, Sir, the natural operation of the regulations we have established, and the powerful check given to fraud and imposition, has put it in our power to furnish *more liberal relief* to the poor in their own dwellings, in cases of real necessity and distress; and we have *actually* granted them this relief. We have at this very time upon our books, paupers disabled by accidents, or whose families are visited with sickness, that receive a much larger weekly allowance than could or would have been afforded to them before this establishment took place.* The raw material is also de-

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livered

* The 11th Bye-Law of the Shrewsbury House states, That no *weekly* pay be allowed to the Out-poor, except in the cases there mentioned. The word *weekly* is printed in italics, to express the real object of this regulation; which was to distinguish *weekly* from *occasional* relief. The Bye-Law has been since amended

livered out to the poor, to be spun by them into yarn, &c. at their own houses, or to be wove there, in a more advanced stage of the manufacturing process.

We consider the House of Industry as a receptacle, or *stated* abode, only for the infirm who are altogether disabled, those children before mentioned, and those also for whom their parents are unable to provide. These latter are taken into the House, where they are clothed, fed, and taught. Their parents visit them, and they visit their parents. When they are put out apprentices, the parents are always consulted; and when *they* object to the party, no contract takes place. Their abode in the House, therefore, is no greater a separation than takes place when children are sent to reside at school. Happy, indeed, *is* the separation for the children of profligate parents. It is likewise an *occasional* residence for those poor single persons who cannot procure employ, or who are under a temporary disability, from sickness or other-

amended; and does not (as indeed it never did) preclude weekly allowances or pay, so long as the parties are deemed proper objects for it.

otherwise, to earn their own support. To all these, it is a most comfortable asylum, and they are all at liberty to depart, with all their property, when they find themselves in a situation to provide for their own maintenance.

It might be deemed invidious to enter more at large into a comparison of the two Plans; that already adopted by *Houses* of Industry, and that now proposed for the establishment of *Schools*. Let the candid and impartial, dismissing all unjust prejudice and prepossession, determine whether of the two is the best calculated to guard against fraud, abuse, and extravagant expenditure; to introduce with the least difficulty, that reform and industry among the poor, which are the leading and important objects of both; and to effect a reduction of the poor rates.

But, however opinions may differ in this respect, it is with confidence expected from the wisdom, and from the honour of Parliament, that if the present Bill, notwithstanding all the serious objections which have been stated thereto, must pass into

into a law, established Houses of Industry may at least be exempted from its operation: and that both experiments may be fairly tried, until experience shall with certainty decide, which is most practicable and expedient.

Perhaps it will be said, that it is high time some effort should be made to introduce Industry among the Poor, and promote their reform; that plausible objections may be advanced against every proposition that could be brought forward for that purpose; and that it is impossible to engage in the attempt, without encountering some difficulties, and risking some expense.

But, Sir, in the present state of things, will it not be wise, as far as possible, to *diminish* those difficulties, and that risk?— Were a general Bill passed, empowering parishes, whenever they shall think it expedient, to incorporate themselves for the purpose of establishing Houses of Industry, under the government and management of what I have called permanent Boards, vesting in those Boards the necessary powers, under such *well-considered* restrictions as the wisdom

wisdom of Parliament shall think meet, (but not under the superintendence and controul of Justices or Privy Counsellors) and guarding at the same time, by positive restraints, against any abuse of that power to the oppression of the poor; it is humbly conceived, that all will be done by the Legislature, with respect to the *Employment* of the poor, that they can to any good purpose attempt.*

Sir, the terrible idea that such Boards would abuse their power, is a phantom that has been conjured up by men of heated imaginations, and exists no where but in their disturbed and busy fancies: their wild and unqualified assertions have no foundation in fact; and serve only to mark how far men may be misled by groundless prejudices, hastily adopted and obstinately retained. Is it probable that twelve or twenty men with the respectable qualifications required, should combine to oppress the Poor? Is not power as safely at least lodged

* The general Act of 23d Geo. III. contains clauses respecting a general assessment for parishes so united, and the *annual* election and office of guardian, &c. that render it useless for the purpose intended.

lodged in their hands, as in the hands of any one or two Magistrates, or of any "Manager of a School of Industry?" and may not a wise and equitable outline be drawn for their guidance and direction?

Were some such proposition as the above adopted, parishes would then, as they found the burden of parochial taxes becoming intolerable, *voluntarily* adopt that mode of introducing employment for the poor, which, from their knowledge of local circumstances, they found to be the most eligible. They would then engage in the attempt with a hearty good will; and this most desirable alteration in the state and government of the poor, would *gradually* take place. It is such free and voluntary exertions, and such a mode of proceeding only, that can furnish the least chance of success.

I have thus, Sir, freely, but I hope with proper decency and respect, taken the liberty to lay before you and the public, those observations that have occurred to me, after serious attention to this very important subject. I neither wish, nor expect, that they should receive any further consideration or regard, than they may derive

derive from their intrinsic weight in the scale of sound reason and impartial judgment. I have no private views to serve; no favours to solicit; no party interest to promote. Content with the humble discharge of my duty as a member of society, I shall at all events enjoy the satisfaction, of having sincerely and honestly endeavoured to promote its welfare.

With much respectful consideration, I have the honour to subscribe myself,

SIR,

Your obedient,

humble Servant,

Shrewsbury,
23d Jan. 1797.

I. WOOD.



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